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An Englishman talks it out
with an Irishman

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AN ENGLISHMAN TALKS IT OUT WITH AN IRISHMAN

By A. R. ORAGE



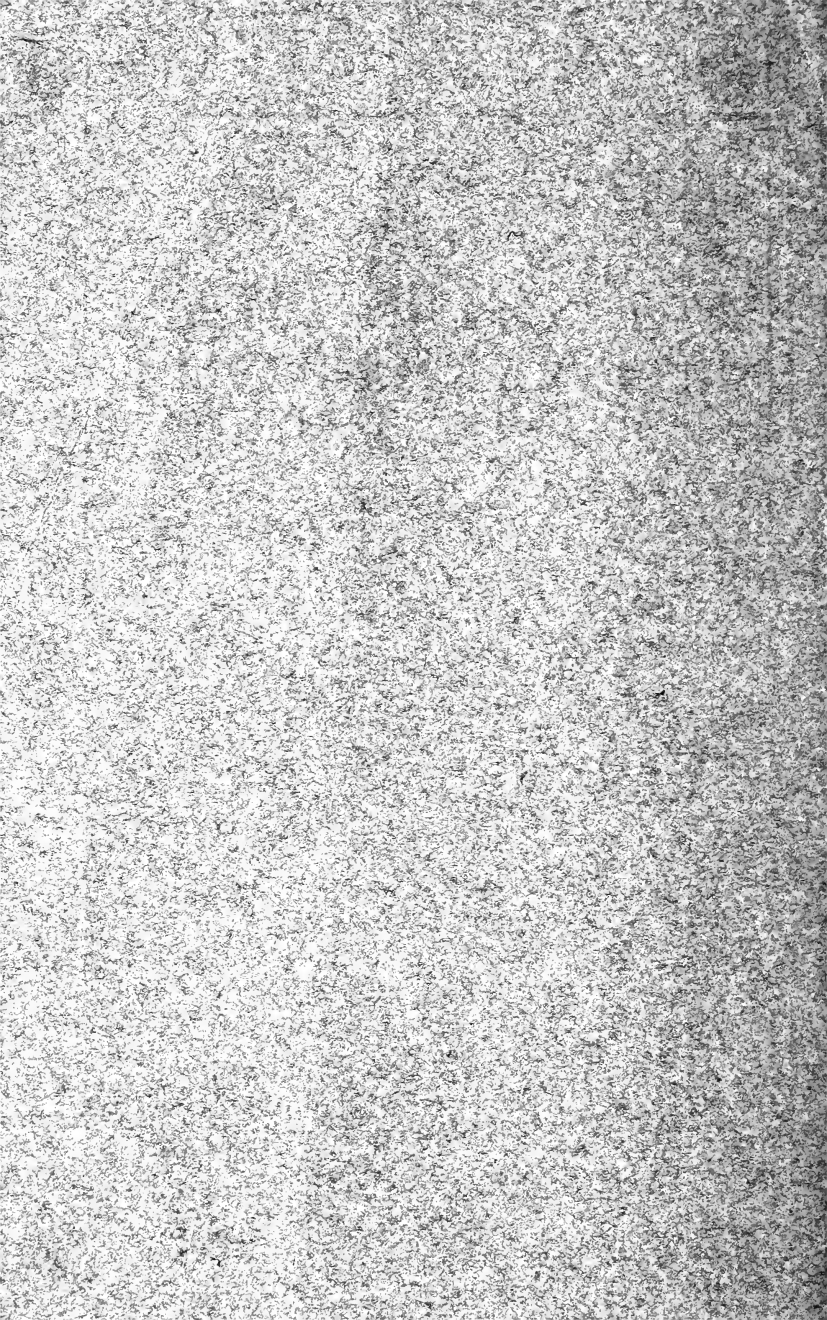
With a Preface by
JOHN EGLINTON

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P R E F A C E

THE following dialogue appeared in the *New Age* of May 23, 1918, as the Editor's "Notes of the Week" for that issue, and as it occurred to several readers that an enquiry so entirely fair and so transparently well-meaning deserved special attention, Mr. Orage was asked to allow it to appear also in pamphlet form, and very courteously consented. It will be found that the Irishman is allowed his full share in the argument; that he often returns to the same point, as he is given to do in actual discussion, without "knowing when he is beaten"; and that he is allowed the last word, in which, we are pleased to note, he appears not unaffected by the powerful and impassioned reasonings of his interlocutor.

Do Irishmen understand Ireland any better than Englishmen do? Certainly most Irishmen who have tried to rid themselves of religious or caste prejudice, and to consider the Irish problem dispassionately, are as often inclined as Englishmen, if not more so, to pronounce it insoluble. On the other hand, the comments of Englishmen on the Irish problem frequently take something for granted at which an Irishman's susceptibilities, more delicate in a matter which relates to himself, take offence. For instance, Mr. Orage's postulate that Ireland is a "nation" has a rough-

and-ready convenience for an outsider, who is often a little impatient with those Irishmen who would feel disposed to pull him up at this first assumption. In a "nation" there is or should be a more than maternal sacrosanctity; a wisdom derived from old experience transcending the experience of any individual; a mystical initiative holding intercourse with that Providence which directs mankind, and prompting the hero and the patriot to words and deeds above their understanding. Nationality in this sense is perhaps an excessive claim to make for that portion of the Irish population whose loyalty to the Catholic religion has been almost the sole agent in keeping it separate, and in constituting for it a peculiar tradition; whose avowed ideal now appears to be to live as if no other nation existed; and which, in the survey of its own history, stipulates more or less that you ignore the events and radical changes of the last one hundred if not three hundred or even eight hundred years. However, though we feel disposed to pull up Mr. Orage at the outset over his assumption of Irish "nationality," at the back of our minds we are prepared to capitulate. The extraordinary and disconcerting part which Ireland has taken up in the present war has impressed the staunchest Unionist of the old-fashioned type, as much as it has disappointed those idealizing Unionists, to be found in various political parties, who had adopted from their literary studies or from the humanitarian ideals of the age the conception of a new and regenerate Ireland, pacified in her long-disturbed soul and mewing her uncontaminated youth as in the days of Fionn. It was disappointing to discover that the soul of Ireland was still lodged deep in the imbroglio of the 17th century. Yet the notoriety which Ireland has recently gained, though not a ground for general

and unmixed patriotic satisfaction, has brought home to us all that Ireland has, or rather that there is in Ireland, a corporate consciousness and initiative all its own. The most inveterate disparager of Irish nationalism must renounce his scepticism as he passes to-day through O'Connell Street. Yes, let us acknowledge it, the political faddists, the radiant-faced dreamers, the Protestant Home Rulers, were right; the unbelievers, the upholders of the *fait accompli*, the Irish Unionist Alliance, have been proved to be in the wrong.

“Peace hath her victories no less renowned than war.” Admitting the existence in Ireland of a national consciousness and initiative, which it has been chiefly the part of the Catholic Church to conserve, much remains to be done before the descendants of the Anglo-Irish and Scotch-Irish populations, firmly established here by the grace of God, can listen with becoming filial silence, much less with vehement acclamation, to the grandiloquent claim of the old mother-nation to be a Republic or a Sovereign State. They have to be brought into it, and they are, after all, over a million of imperfectly convinced Protestant Irishmen, in Ireland's little population of four millions, and not, if it may be believed, without a patriotism of their own. The Sinn Feiners, in short, if they really are the other three millions, will have to take a different tone with them from that which they adopt if they wish to avoid trouble from them, and impregnate them with the national idea. For really, it is rather magnanimous of them, when one comes to think of it—considering that books have been written about them under the title of the ‘Irish Nation,’ and that a long line of their worthies in politics literature and science, has helped

to make the name of Ireland illustrious through the world—to be disposed now to acknowledge that the original title-deeds of Irish nationality reside after all in the tradition of the old Catholic population.

JOHN EGLINTON.

An Englishman Talks it Out with an Irishman.

“ TELL us, if you will, what is your aim in this perpetual agitation of yours ? ”

“ The independence of our country. ‘ We desire to be ourselves, to live our own life, without any extraneous influences.’—[*New Ireland*, p. 398.]”

“ Upon what do you base your claim ? ”

“ On our nationality, on our history, and, opportunely, on the admissions made by England in her present war with Germany.”

“ What of your nationality ? ”

“ We do not merely claim to be, we are of a different race from the English. We are as different from the English, in spite of the present community of language, as the French, the Polish, the Belgians and the Serbians are from the Germans. The English to us are a foreign race ; and the Irish are likewise to the English, if the latter would but admit it, a foreign and an incomprehensible people. Moreover, to this difference of race there is added in our case a difference of religion and of the culture that is finally based on religion. We are not only not English but we are not disposed to anglicise. We are Irish and desire to be

Irish for ever. And since this is the case, in making our demand for political independence we are demanding no more than the explicit recognition of the fact of our psychological and spiritual independence. As we can never form a part of the English polity in our hearts, neither do we desire to do so in our secular politics. We are races apart."

"But historical circumstances have often overcome racial differences—what is your claim from history?"

"We deny that at any time since England conquered Ireland by force over seven hundred years ago Ireland has ever assented to the fact or made common history with her conquerors. 'Your people in their schools and universities have been taught that Ireland had become an integral part of the United Kingdom . . . but British authority, at all periods in Irish history, as to-day, has rested solely on superior power. . . . There has never been a year in the seven centuries of that domination when the vast majority of the people were not opposed to it. . . That feeling has been as deep, indeed much deeper, and more self-conscious since the Act of Union was passed; and to-day . . . it is more vivid, passionate and dominant than at any period in Irish history.'—[A.E.]"

"What are the admissions made by England during the present war that lend force, as you say, to your claims to independence?"

"In the first place, England professes to be fighting in the cause of small and oppressed nationalities. Must it not appear hypocritical to Ireland for England to undertake such a crusade with just such a victim at her own door? In the second place, we contend that the cases of Alsace-Lorraine and Ireland are similar on all essential points. We challenge

England to produce a single reason, if she is sincere in her support of France's claim to the restoration of the two provinces, for her own continued refusal to restore to Ireland Ireland's four conquered provinces. Differing, as we have said, in race and history from our conquerors quite as markedly as Alsace-Lorraine from Germany, Ireland has lost by the English conquest even more than France ever lost by the German annexations. For France was only mutilated, while Ireland was taken captive whole. France lost two provinces; but Ireland lost her all. We contend, therefore, that we have a greater reason than France to demand the restitution of our provinces; and the motives which England professes to actuate her in her support of France are doubled and intensified in the case of Ireland. In the third place, if you cite the examples of Belgium, Serbia, Montenegro, Roumania, Poland and the Russian provinces, and declare to us that England intends to remain in the war until they are free—we cannot help, again, thinking of our own situation and reflecting on the thought that it were better that England should begin her crusade nearer home. What is the worth to Ireland of a promise of liberation to France, Belgium and the rest if, needing it as much, she alone is not to share in it? Finally, we will not disguise from you a thought in many of our minds, that England's present weakness may be Ireland's opportunity. Taking advantage of England's professions and of England's present difficulties, and remembering our long-delayed but never-abandoned claim, you should not be surprised if some of us regard the present moment as favourable to our national cause."

"You are frank, as I wished you to be. But frank-

ness is not always incompatible with a little hypocrisy. Is there not something a little hypocritical in your appeal to the professions made by England during the war ; and still more, in your suggestion to take advantage of the situation England is in ? You accuse England of having rested its rule of Ireland upon superior force, and I understand you to pass a moral censure upon the fact. But is it not upon force that you are now proposing to act yourselves ? Taking advantage of our accidental weakness and of Ireland's accidental strength, you, too, propose to employ for your own purposes what you fancy to be a ' superior force.' By so threatening, you appear to me to be dangerously near to justifying the use of force in all circumstances. But even this is not the most ambiguous of your recent arguments. You compare your own case with that of Alsace-Lorraine, and with the cases of Serbia and Roumania. But you will observe two important differences between yourselves and them. These small nations have a right to appeal to the Allies for liberation, since they sincerely believe that the Allies are sincere in their desire to liberate them. And, secondly, you will observe that these small nations are likewise fighting for their own liberation on the side of the Allies. They both believe and do, whereas you in Ireland neither believe in the sincerity of the Allies, nor do anything to assist them. But we may return to the war later. Will you now tell me what kind of independence it is that you desire ? You know that, roughly, there are three possible degrees of political independence—federalism, colonial autonomy or status, and sovereign independence. Which of these three do you desire ? ”

“ While none of us are in favour of federalism, a

minority would be content with colonial autonomy, but the majority of us desire complete and sovereign independence."

"I agree with you in dismissing federalism, but for other reasons, perhaps, than yours. If it would interest you to know them, I will enumerate them as follows. To begin with, it is an objection to federalism that Ireland is unanimously opposed to it; for why should we, at great trouble to ourselves, re-arrange our political constitution for an end that such a re-arrangement cannot possibly fulfil; it would plainly be labour for nothing. Next, federalism, even if it should be acceptable to Ireland, would create, in my judgment, more problems than it would solve; one devil would give place to seven worse devils. Then I cannot see any advantage from a federalism for which there is no real demand in any of the countries proposed for federation. Men's minds will not have been prepared to make it work; but it would be superimposed upon them like an alien system. Lastly, as it was only designed, I think, in the belief that it might make Home Rule palatable to Ulster, I think myself that to burn down our historic house to roast a pig is extravagance, and, most of all, when it would have the pig still uncooked. Forgive me this digression; and now let us return to the matter in hand. Have you, I ask, considered the difficulties in the way of the complete and sovereign independence of Ireland which you say a majority of you desire? The difficulties, as I see them, fall into two classes: difficulties for England, and difficulties for Ireland herself."

"As to the former—England's difficulties—they are no concern of ours. We never asked to be conquered, we never asked to be colonised. If these facts have

now created difficulties for England, it is her nemesis."

"It is strange how many things you affirm have no concern for Ireland; and I see danger in your insistence upon the isolation of Ireland from the rest of mankind. 'Ourselves alone' is scarcely a motto for a new age. However, in the present case, it is surely your concern whether England is or is not in a mood or a situation to respond favourably to your demand for independence. Since, whatever you may dream to the contrary, you cannot by any means force England to grant Home Rule, her consent is necessary; and I should say further that her willing consent is desirable."

"But why can we not force England to give Ireland her liberty?"

"Perhaps it is as well that the question should be asked; but I should prefer that some of you should answer it for yourselves. May I remind you, however, that if the appeal is to force, the situation of England is not so low that she has not strength enough, if challenged by force, to reduce Ireland to beggary in a week. You do not think that a Power capable of standing up to Prussia must submit to the force of Ireland?"

"England, however, dare not attempt the re-conquest of Ireland. If she should attempt it, 'there will grow up a hate which will be inextinguishable . . . it will be fed by tradition everywhere . . . (the stain of it) will spread over the Empire . . . millions of the bitterest tongues in the world will be incessantly wagging, breeding sedition in your dominions . . . to lend force to those already numerous voices which hold that the tie of empire is a danger . . . '—(A.E.)"

"God forbid that I should even appear to speak

lightly of such a prospect ; but, in justice to the argument, I must observe that such a calamity as you describe, were it brought about, would not necessarily evoke sympathy on Ireland's side alone. Whether you are at this moment disposed to admit it or not (and I think you are not) England's case against Ireland to-day, and at this particular juncture of affairs, is less weak than it has ever been. The hatred which you rightly say Ireland would feel for England under the circumstances referred to, would not only be returned in English bitterness, but in a lesser degree in the world's bitterness against Ireland. Exactly in so far as the world believes England to be fighting for the liberty of the world, Ireland's attempt to impede England's task would be regarded as an offence of Ireland against the world. You would make martyrs, but not all the saints would be on your side. But let us put aside that hypothesis ; and agree that England's consent is both necessary and desirable. The question is by what means England's consent may be most easily and most fully secured. May I say that, in my opinion, Ireland's independence can be most easily and fully secured by the evidence that it is a necessary " war-measure " for England ? I am not contending, you will understand, that this is an elevated motive ; or that the motive of pure justice would not be nobler. It would be easy to debate the case in ethics, and to prove, as I think I could, that such a surrender of power on the part of England, though described and accepted as a " war-measure," would, in fact, be a sacrifice of the finest kind. Rather than jeopardise the world's cause at stake in the war, England, it might be maintained, was prepared to sacrifice her long-cherished ideal of a United Kingdom.

But I am not, as I have said, making this contention at this moment. I am simply saying that, as a matter of fact, and for many reasons, it is by being presented to England as a 'war-measure' that the independence of Ireland can at this moment be most easily and fully secured."

"If you mean that in return for her rightful independence, Ireland must promise beforehand to join England in the present war and to consent to conscription, even to self-imposed conscription, we reply that we decline to purchase our rights or to preempt our self-determination. What we shall do with our liberty when we have obtained it we shall do; but we must decline to sell our future even for liberty."

"Or your present liberty for Ireland's future? However, I understand your refusal, and we will defer the discussion for a while. England's difficulties in granting sovereign independence to Ireland having been set aside for the moment, let us now consider Ireland's difficulties in accepting sovereign independence. They are not small. I think, in fact, that they are not to be overcome save by the defeat of Prussia. It is not only, I would say, the sovereign independence of Ireland that is contingent in its barest possibility upon the defeat of Prussia, but any lesser degree of independence also, even down to Ireland's present status of a politically integral part of the United Kingdom. But this, I realise, is what I have to prove. You are not at present disposed to think that the issue of the war is an Irish as well as a world-issue."

"Frankly, we are not at present—not the majority of us, at any rate. Some of us do not deny that 'the principles for which Britain is contending in this

war may be right . . . many who most bitterly oppose British policy in Ireland think they are right.'—[A.E.] But others, and the majority, think that as 'a war for the rights of the little nations it is the greatest fraud in all history. . . (They) do not believe that the present war has any relation to the freedom of nations great or small. . . . Everyone in England to-day seems to believe that his own country, and his own country alone, is standing in the war for a noble cause. . . (but the cause is one) of Empires, Great Powers, Balance of Power, Secret Treaties, and the entire stock-in-trade of the nineteenth century diplomacy and statecraft, all of which we trust will be irretrievably smashed by it.'—[*New Ireland*]. While, therefore, we may 'sympathise with the people of England and would not wound any of them in this crisis of their history' [A.E.]; and while, even, we can see that it is 'a life and death struggle for England . . . our case is the case of the Belgians, Serbians, Poles, Finns, Czechs, Jugo-Slavs and Armenians.'—[*New Ireland*.] We are concerned with our liberty, but England is not."

"You are under the most tragical illusions it is possible to conceive. If they are, as I think them, delusions due to your seven centuries of pre-occupation with your own fate of dependence, never have I heard a more terrible witness to the curse of national subjection. Such aberrations from the truth of things are the awful consequence of conquest and subjection. But will you listen to me while I enumerate and deny your misunderstandings? And will you try to believe that I am affirming what appears to me and most of the rest of the world to be true; and, moreover, try also to enter into our minds? To begin with, you say

that this is England's war and that England imagines herself to be fighting alone for a noble cause. On the face of it, this cannot be true, since England is well aware that she is only one of many Allies, each of whom, we are grateful in affirming, is fighting likewise in the same noble cause. Would France and Italy, would America and Japan, be fighting in a war that was merely England's war? Though England should be compelled to drop out of the war, America has already announced that she alone would continue it; yet not alone, for it is certain that Japan would be by her side. You say, again, or you imply, that if Ireland were free she would be safe, whatever result otherwise the war might have; and that, either free or bond, the conclusion of the war is a matter of indifference to Ireland. On the contrary, Ireland's freedom, in the event of a German victory, would not be worth a week's purchase; and even if she should remain bond until the end of the war, a German victory would make her more bond than ever. You imply, again, that between German Imperialism and British Imperialism there is no difference; that if Ireland is bond, it is of no concern to her whether her gaoler is Germany or England; that Empire and Commonwealth are the same; and that Empire, Balance of Power, diplomacy and the like are mere words to disguise the suppression of national liberties. But behind these words are substantial things having a significance of more than nominal reality. I will not trouble you at this moment with a lecture upon first principles; but I will merely affirm that between German Imperialism and the principles for which the Allies stand there is all the difference between a new, hopeful and growing future and the repetition of an

ancient and hopeless past ; and that as between Germany and England the choice of Ireland, even if she should remain bond, should be England, if only because the future of a victorious England must be with freedom, whereas the future of a victorious Germany is necessarily with slavery. Finally, you repeat, I observe, your comparison of Ireland with Belgium and the rest of the small nations now subjected ; you say your case is also theirs. But may I reply again that they would be the first to deny the comparison ; for, unlike you, they not only look to the defeat of Germany as their only hope of liberation, but one and all, they have fought against Germany by the side of England, and they are fighting still. If they are right in believing that the Allies stand for the independence of small nations, then Ireland is wrong. If they are wrong, then they are mad, England is mad, the Allies are mad, and only Ireland outside Germany is sane. For Ireland is the only voluntary neutral among all the small nations of the world. However, I promised that I would not deliver you a lecture, and here I am at an exordium. What I wished to say was in sum this, that Irish independence, of whatever degree, even the very smallest, is only possible if Germany be defeated. In any other circumstances, not only must Ireland forgo her hope for the future, but even that liberty she hath shall be taken away. But let us get back to our last cross-roads—we were enquiring whether a free Ireland—in other words, an Ireland with the whole of its present grievance removed—could maintain its independence in no matter what circumstances the war may leave the rest of the world. All you ask for is your sovereign liberty ; and thereafter the war may end as it pleases ?”

“ We should have no fear of Germany, if that is what you mean.”

“ But is that to say that Ireland would have no reason to fear Germany? With the fate of Serbia, Belgium, Roumania and Poland before your eyes, has Ireland nothing to fear from Germany?”

“ But what can Germany want with Ireland? We are not next-door neighbours of hers.”

“ Let me read you what John Mitchel wrote in the *Irish Citizen* nearly fifty years ago. ‘ Prussia,’ he said, ‘ cannot be England’s friend. Prussia has her own aspirations and ambitions; one of these is to be a great maritime Power, or, rather, *the* great maritime Power of Europe: and nothing in the future can be more sure than that Prussia, if successful in this struggle with France [1870], will take Belgium and threaten from Antwerp the mouth of the Thames.’ Mitchel, you will see, was a political prophet. He foresaw, before Prussia had begun to build up her navy, that Prussia would aim at becoming the paramount maritime Power of Europe.”

“ But what is that to Ireland? Surely that is only England’s concern.”

“ We must remember that in fifty years the conditions of the world have changed. For Europe the world must now be substituted, for the world has now shrunk to the size that Europe was half a century ago. To be the prime maritime Power of Europe is no longer a sufficiently elevated aim; whoever aims to-day at supreme sea-power must aim at supreme sea-power in the world, and not only in Europe. For this reason, we must substitute for the mouth of the Thames in Mitchel’s forecast a still more favourable base for sea-power. What is necessary is

more than a mere estuary. A supreme continental maritime Power would need, above all, an island well supplied with harbours, an island on the ocean routes, an island that could not be easily dominated by any rival Power. You know the island I have in mind—Ireland."

"But is this more than an Imperial nightmare?"

"Nightmares are among the most common phenomena of actuality at this moment. Far from this possibility that I have sketched being a creature of my fancy, you will find it laid down with almost official precision in the plans of the present Prussian régime. Ireland, you can satisfy yourselves, is very near to Prussia's heart. For further witness I would refer you to the statesmanlike calculation of Sir Roger Casement, who realised, more clearly even than Prussia, that Ireland is the key of the maritime power of the world. 'Without a definite German policy towards Ireland,' he wrote, 'Germany may win the present war on the Continent, but she will never win sea freedom abroad.' Would Prussia, I ask, leave such a key in Ireland's keeping? Assuming that Ireland were a sovereign State, would she, with such valuables about her, long remain sovereign?"

"The danger, however, is so remote that it is scarcely worth discussing."

"On the contrary, it is present and immediate. Only weeks, conceivably, may separate Ireland from it. Assume that Germany wins the land-war, and at once these maritime plans would begin to be put into execution."

"What do you mean by Germany winning the war? The phrase is indefinite."

"Not so the fact, however. By winning the war

I mean that Germany would succeed in establishing her hegemony of Europe."

"How would that affect Ireland?"

"We have to see what probable consequences would follow from such a conclusion of the war. There is, you know, human nature in England as well as in Ireland. Human nature, indeed, is wonderfully uniformly distributed among mankind. What I am about to say would probably follow the German hegemonisation of Europe is not, therefore, to be understood as what *should* follow if men were other than they are. It is a political forecast of actuality, that is all."

"But we distrust these political forecasts. Few of them are ever realised."

"Yet you also make them and even depend upon them, for how otherwise would you strive even for political independence? Do not you calculate that certain consequences will follow on certain facts? You dismiss federalism, for instance, before you have experienced it, on grounds imaginatively calculated in advance. By the same political arithmetic (whether you work your sum correctly or not) you choose sovereign independence in preference to colonial autonomy on their merits as forecast by imagination. The task of foreknowing what will follow from a German hegemony of Europe is not, in reality, any more difficult. Let us work the sum. To begin with, you would not deny that, in consequence of her success, Germany would find herself militarily more powerful than ever. Secondly, having successfully disestablished the Balance of Power in Europe, the German Empire, far from ceasing to be an Empire, would become a European Empire instead. To consolidate

her new acquisitions and to incorporate them with herself, it would be necessary for Germany to retain her hold on all the European nations within her present reach, and gradually to bring the rest within her control as well. In short, a German hegemony of Europe and a German Empire extending over Europe are one and the same thing; and either is, therefore, clearly incompatible with the existence of a single small independent nation on the whole Continent. That, I may remark, is what Belgium and Serbia see as clearly as if the fact were already present."

"But why must we suppose that the future of even a successful Germany must needs be Imperialistic? Is it not conceivable that Germany may become a liberal power and the guardian of small nations?"

"It is contrary to the nature of Prussia; it would be in contradiction of Prussia's 'stern historical mission' in the world; and, besides, the situation of the rest of the world would not admit of it. The nature of Prussia is manifested in her constitution; and it is irrevocably militarist. Prussia, while she remains Prussia, can no more cease to be militarist than a man can jump over his own shadow. Prussianism and Imperialism are convertible terms. It is also the case, strange as it may seem to our common sentiments, that Prussia not only does not believe in the value of small independent nations, but refuses them even the hypocrisy of lip-language. Never, throughout the war, has Prussia condescended to pretend that she is fighting on behalf of small nationalities. Her watchword is "Empire or Downfall." Finally, if, as I have said, these miracles of conversion should appear to be imminent, they would be nipped

in the bud by the attitude of the rest of the world towards a victorious Prussia."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Assuming that Prussia wins the present war in the sense we have defined, and taking the world as we find it, you cannot imagine that England or, if England, America, would acquiesce quietly in a Prussian Europe. The hegemony of Europe is a bid for the hegemony of the world; and each of the existing world-Powers—England, America and Japan—would instantly feel itself challenged to a fresh struggle for its independence. But by what means must they proceed to prepare themselves if not by the means taken by Germany? Exactly as we have seen each of the formerly "liberal" countries of the West resuming one by one the liberties of its citizens and concentrating power within its respective State, in order to meet upon equal terms the already State-centralised power of Prussia—so, if Prussia should win and begin to consolidate her Empire in Europe, the remaining Powers would be driven to centralise and consolidate themselves even more intensely in preparation for the inevitable war of Empires. Japan, we may be sure, would do her best to exploit China and as much of Russia as Germany could not absorb. America, I do not doubt, would enter into closer and closer relations with the republics of South America. And England, as the nearest Empire to Germany, and the first to be tried in the new war, would undoubtedly be the first also to prepare herself as an Empire to fight an Empire. Four Empires would thus divide the world between them, and each would be armed to the last man. I ask you to consider whether, under these circumstances, Ireland could maintain her indepen-

dence, alone and isolated. Elsewhere in all the world there would not exist a single free small nation. There would be no neutrals in the next war! What do you think would be the case with Ireland?"

"If Ireland were once free, she would maintain her freedom against a world in arms."

"C'est magnifique mais ce n'est pas the way of the world or of history. It is the misfortune of Ireland, as it has been of Belgium, to occupy geographically one of the strategic points of the world. As Belgium has not been able to escape the fate of her situation during the military wars for the maintenance of the balance of land-power in Europe, Ireland could by no means escape the fate of her maritime position in a war for the balance of sea-power in the world. Inevitably she would be compelled to surrender to superior force; and if not to England, then to Germany. If Germany wins, the choice for Ireland is between England and Germany--if, indeed, there would be any choice in the matter."

"But why should Ireland be driven to make a choice and, still more, to having no choice at all? 'We only desire to be ourselves, and to live our own life,' without either being troubled by or troubling anybody. As little as we desire to be a pawn of the British Empire do we desire to be a pawn of Germany. 'We have no desire to be a province of any nation . . . and the position of being 'the slave of a slave' in the event of a German conquest of England is not our desire.'---
[*New Ireland.*]"

"Hell has been defined as a wish without a will; and choice without power is only a mockery of freedom. Do you think that Belgium chose to be over-run by Prussia; or, that, like Ireland, she would not have

preferred to live her own life? It is necessary, even in exercising choice, to take the world as we find it, and since we must make some choice or be chosen without our consent, to make our choice with as much practical wisdom as we can command."

"What are you saying now?"

"I intended to say that it is not too late for Ireland to exercise a choice over her own future. Both the right and the power of choice are in her hands at the present moment; but, if Germany should win, Ireland's power of choice is gone for ever."

"Choice between what alternatives has Ireland at this moment?"

"Between an Allied victory and a German victory."

"You have failed to show us, however, that the choice is any more than indifferent. Between British Imperialism and German Imperialism there is no difference that we can discover. Consequently, between a British and a German victory there is no matter for preference."

"I have already attempted to prove to you that it is not only British Imperialism that is involved in the war, but principles common to the Allies in general. Your present choice is not, therefore, as you suggest, a choice between England and Germany, but between a future under the auspices of the Allies and a future under the auspices of Germany. Do you think there is no difference between these? Let me enumerate a few of them. We are now to assume that the Allies win the war and that Prussian militarism has been destroyed, either by defeat, or, better still, by the act of its own subjects. And we are to consider whether Ireland would be better off under these circumstances than after a Prussian victory whose conse-

quences we have already examined. To begin with, I may point out that the Allies are composed mainly of Ireland's friends—friends, I mean, of Ireland's independence. A victory for America, France and the British dominions can scarcely be less favourable to Ireland in any circumstances than a victory for Germany, Austria, Turkey and Bulgaria. Next, it is to be observed that a victory for the Allies will be followed in necessity by a general liberation of small nations. Unless, as I have said before, Belgium, Serbia, Poland, Roumania and all the rest of the now subject nations are mad in looking to an Allied victory for deliverance, the restoration of their independence will be the first-fruits of the defeat of Prussia. Would the day of such a release have no reaction upon Ireland? Would it be possible that, even if not before, Ireland alone would fail to share in the jubilee of small nations? Next you will observe that of all the Great Powers then left in the world, none cherishes the aim of Prussia—the aim of universal dominion. There would be Empires, perhaps, but no Imperialism; World-Powers, but no longer the cult of World-Power. Further, in the absence of the present Prussian danger making for protective centralisation in the challenged nations, the tendency even of the remaining Empires would be towards decentralisation, in other words, towards commonwealth. A commonwealth is an Empire out of danger; as an Empire is a commonwealth in danger, or in a state of ambition. The centripetal tendencies of to-day would give way to centrifugal tendencies; interpreted politically, liberties now concentrated would be distributed. To sum up the matter briefly, I would say that an Allied victory means in the end if only by slow stages all that

it has been declared to mean—the victory of democracy, and the establishment of commonwealths. And Ireland, I cannot but think, would share fully in it.”

“ It is a coloured picture, but a picture only, we fear. Doubtless you believe, but ‘ we do not ’ [*New Ireland*]. We have waited for freedom so long, and have been cheated of it so often, that you should not be surprised if upon this occasion we ask an earnest as well as a promise. Ireland is not free. After seven centuries of subjection still is Ireland not free. Between the sure possession of freedom and the doubtful prospect of freedom there is a world of difference.”

“ I know there is ; but there is also a world of difference between the prospect of freedom and the certainty of continued subjection. Even, therefore, if it should be no more than a choice between the doubtful prospect of freedom from an Allied victory and the certainty of continued subjection from a Prussian victory, your choice, if to be pitied, is, nevertheless, not indifferent. Again, I would remind you that even in this choice you do not stand alone. What more than the prospect of freedom have Belgium and Serbia—‘ whose case is that of Ireland ’ [*New Ireland*]. No more, but far less, than Ireland have they the possession of freedom. Their freedom, likewise, is only in prospect. As further instances I might cite to you the examples of South Africa and of Socialism in England. We Socialists have had to make our choice and to decide upon which event rested our best hopes for the future, the event of an Allied, or the event of a Prussian victory. Ireland has at worst no harder a choice to make than that.”

“ Nevertheless, call it historic necessity, national idiosyncrasy, or what you will, Ireland demands an earnest of England.”

“ I understand and I agree. An earnest is necessary. Though, as I have tried to show, Ireland has a world of freedom to gain and nothing to lose but her chains from the defeat of Prussia, it is still not to be expected that she can believe that in fighting for England she is fighting for herself, without some immediate evidence of it. An earnest of England’s promise of liberty to Ireland is necessary. I repeat it. But are you willing to give the Allies—not England alone, you observe—an earnest in return ? ”

“ The earnest Ireland asks for is an instalment merely of her national right. We cannot recognise it as the subject of a bargain. Self-determination is incompatible with pre-determination ; and we have no title to pledge Ireland’s liberty in advance. We think, moreover, that what you have in mind is the exchange of Home Rule for Conscription. Let us say at once that Ireland will never submit to conscription at the hands of England, even in return for golden promises and immediate pledges.”

“ Again I agree ; and, in fact, I had not the suggestion in mind. Like you, I am convinced that the conscription of Ireland by England, even in the defence of Ireland, is impracticable. I agree, moreover, that even if it were possible it would be a wrong. No, what I had in mind was the voluntary service of Ireland in the common cause, and the earnest of it in the form of an honourable understanding.”

“ To be explicit, you mean an understanding on our part to employ such freedom as we may be about to

receive in determining what form our co-operation with the Allies shall take ? ”

“ I am not asking for a reciprocal earnest myself, you understand. I appreciate sufficiently well, I hope, both your history and the Irish character to regard, for my part, any such earnest as superfluous. It is Ireland, I agree, that needs an earnest of England, rather than England of Ireland. You might tell me, however, what you would reply to the suggestion which, you know, has been made.”

“ Actions speak louder than words. Let me remind you of what occurred when war broke out. “ What did the Irish people do when Belgium was plundered. . . . Nationalist Ireland, through Mr. Redmond, in addition to the 80,000 Irishmen who were already serving, offered the immediate aid of 170,000 Irish National Volunteers already partly trained. (Though this offer was refused) the Nationalists of Ireland in one year raised and trained two new Divisions, the 10th and 16th, while Ulster raised the 36th. Before the first year ended there were already 150,000 men raised and trained in Ireland, and another 100,000 who, though born in Ireland, were at that time working in England. . . . These figures would represent a voluntary military contribution of over four million soldiers from America. . . . and the number at this moment must be far more than doubled.’—[Col. Maurice Moore]. That is my reply to the demand for an earnest of Ireland’s sympathies. The Allies have it.”

“ You will not deny, however, that recruiting has ceased, and that your leaders now no longer encourage it.”

“ Perhaps you do not remember the story, though it

→ was more or less openly told in the House of Commons by Mr. Lloyd George. 'Stupidities,' he said, 'were done which sometimes looked like malignities.' He might have gone further and asserted with truth that the malignancies were not apparent merely. 'The enemies of Ireland would not have our free service. Their agents here, as I know, and as it was confessed to me, objected to Nationalists and Catholics enlisting in the Army, because it removed the main argument against self-government on which they relied. They wanted Nationalists dragged as slaves and humiliated, and this at a time when self-consciousness and pride in nationality had become a burning flame.'—[A.E.] The earnest we were willing and anxious to give, you allowed our enemies in England and Ireland to refuse. Lest Ireland should obtain credit by a free gift, and so win the recognition of her right to independence, these enemies refused the gift only to make it appear that force was necessary. We were to be sacrificed, but not voluntarily; our sacrifice was to be turned to our disgrace. Is it any wonder after this that "sympathy was changed to indifference and indifference fanned into hostility, or that hostility is changing, I fear, to bitter hate?"—[A.E.]"

"None. Nevertheless, heroic as the alternative was—that of persisting in offering yourselves and insisting upon service in the common cause—would it not have been wiser? As it is, does it not appear that you have fallen into the snare openly laid for you by your enemies? Can they not now point out that your voluntary service has ceased (for what reason they know but will conceal), and thus appear to justify in the eyes of the ignorant their malignant designs to enforce a service they refused as a gift?"

“ There is no help for it. The day is gone. Hatred cannot so easily be changed back to hostility, hostility to indifference, and indifference to active sympathy. The transformations were slow in being made ; they will be slow in being reversed.”

“ But the circumstances are not the same to-day. They have changed for Ireland for the better. Not only is conscription, thanks to your own action, practically impossible ; but it is felt to be criminal and impossible by many more people in England than ever before. I do not think your enemies can count upon their triumph in this respect. Again, it appears to me that England is prepared to give an earnest to Ireland of the prospects of an Allied victory obtained with Ireland’s help, in the form of a measure, at least, of self-determination. If that should happily be the case, your domestic enemies will have been defeated in their two tricks of at once imposing conscription and continued subjection upon Ireland. Is that not something gained ? Finally, it is obvious that the Allies’ need, including the need of England, is greater or more clearly realised to-day than it was in the early days of the war. The offer of voluntary service would not, I believe, be refused or allowed to be met by stupidity bordering upon malignancy, as it was three years ago. May I add that Ireland, too, has had time to learn the significance of the war.”

“ Let us be plain, even if we are few. You have no authority to speak for England ; we have no power to pledge Ireland. Things will be as they will be. But for our understanding of one another, we are agreed as follows : that England owes an earnest to Ireland of the sincerity of her profession that this is a war of liberation for small nations, including Ireland ;

that no earnest of Ireland's good-will is to be demanded as a condition of receiving it; nevertheless, that it shall be honourably understood that as Ireland was and proved herself to be in the early days of the war, she is likely when free to be again."

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